



September 14, 2020

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

I am part of a local citizens group in Takoma Park who have studied the causes of global warming, and *ways to reverse it*, ever since our group participated in a Drawdown Workshop last fall. Though I am concerned about all kinds of waste, from food to every form of plastic, I will address my comments to the subjects of the two Bills—32-20 and 33-20—about which you are seeking public comment.

In short, I support the purposes of the two bills: to ban plastic straws, ban Styrofoam of any kind, and ban #6 plastic, or polystyrene from all food packaging and products, and to replace those plastic materials with environmentally sustainable alternatives. I endorse the County's focus on Waste Reduction and Source Reduction of Single-Use Straws, Styrofoam and other #6 Polystyrene Food Service Packaging and Products. Indeed, in light of current climate and environmental crises, I would like to see you go further, which I address below.

Many years ago, the town of Takoma Park had a living mascot, Roscoe the Rooster. Roscoe used to strut around the streets of downtown and greet the dawn with his distinctive rooster call to "Wake up!" Though Roscoe the Rooster is no longer with us physically, his spirit lives on to inspire us. Our group has adopted a set of actions, which we call *Roscoe's Rules*, to mobilize and encourage our community to take the necessary steps to achieve Zero Waste. Of particular concern is the menace that doesn't die, plastic pollution.

Roscoe's Rules include: 1) first and foremost, REFUSE to buy any new plastic products (or anything we don't really need). If we refused to buy, say, any new plastic bags, the effect would be to make the plastic bags we already have more valuable. We would be forced to wash, dry, and store them so we could reuse them over and over. Then we might seek out alternative materials that work just as well. Soon we might learn that we don't really need plastic bags in the first place.

Toward this end, **I recommend that the Council study ways in which the producers and manufacturers of petroleum-based plastic products can be held accountable to assume the**

cost of and responsibility for their effective recycling and safe disposal. If recycling is not possible or feasible for these products, the industry should not produce them in the first place.

Such a move would require that virgin plastic be priced to reflect its true costs to the consumer due to the everlasting harm it causes the environment. This would allow the consumer to see the real cost of buying new plastic and make better more informed decisions about what they buy. Such actions would support Roscoe's other Rules: 2) REUSE (again and again) what we already have, 3) REPURPOSE existing plastic products, and 4) continue to innovate and improve ways to RECYCLE the plastic once it is no longer useful.

I believe plastic producers should own up to the burden their products create for society. Perhaps we should bundle up and deliver all our truckloads of plastic waste to the headquarters of oil and gas companies and their Washington lobbyists and ask them to dispose of it! They would then have to confront, and take responsibility for, the waste problem they created and are maintaining.

As consumer demand for petroleum declines—and electric vehicles and green technology begin to be more sustainable—the oil industry continues to flood the market with petroleum-based plastics. Oil industry's current "pivot to plastics" is an attempt to prop up the demand for oil and gas in the face of individual and community efforts to reduce it. But plastics—bags, food containers, lids, bottles, toys, you name it—have nowhere to go. They simply keep piling up in our landfills.

Meanwhile, we—individuals, towns, counties, states, and nations—seek to take actions and promote policies to resolve the climate crisis, reduce plastic pollution, reduce the size of landfills, and improve the quality of our recycled material. According to an article in the WP, below, it is estimated that "almost 80% of the plastic ever produced is entombed in landfills." What can we do? We can **Refuse** to buy it; we can **Reuse** or **Repurpose** what we already have; and we can **Recycle** it. If markets for recycled plastic are diminishing, it is in no small part because the petroleum industry continues to produce "virgin plastic" at lower prices.

It is time we insist that plastic producers and manufacturers bear the cost and the responsibility of environmentally responsible disposal of these products. Plastic does not go away. Even if it degrades into microscopically smaller pieces, those pieces remain a threat to the health of our wildlife. And when they are ingested by land and sea animals, they also become a threat to the health of the humans who consume those animals. As we learn to use less plastic and to recycle it more effectively, we can undercut this pernicious strategy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Baldwin Anderson".

Janet Baldwin

Sources:

1. **How Big Oil Misled The Public Into Believing Plastic Would Be Recycled**

An NPR and PBS Frontline investigation reveals how the oil and gas industry used the promise of recycling to sell more plastic, even when they knew it would never work on a large scale.

Read in NPR: <https://apple.news/A46YAci01SJivBn-YCaBgUg>

2. **The Climate Crisis**, *The New Yorker* Newsletter of September 10, 2020. Bill McKibben.

3. **All My Takeout Has Delivered a Mountain of Trash**. Tom Sietsma, *Washington Post*, September 14, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/voraciously/wp/2020/09/14/all-my-takeout-has-delivered-a-mountain-of-trash-so-i-asked-experts-how-to-minimize-it/?tid=pm_food_pop